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# James William Lambuth

1829-1892

THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS AN  
ACTIVE MISSIONARY

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*By Walter R. Lambuth*

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Price, 5 Cents

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*Board of Missions M. E. Church, South  
Nashville, Tenn.*





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*Board of Missions M. E. Church, South,  
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*John F. Goucher  
No. ....*

## JAMES WILLIAM LAMBUTH.

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### ANCESTRY.

THE ancestry of James William Lambuth was missionary. His grandfather, William Lambuth, was a member of the Baltimore Conference, ordained deacon by Bishop Coke and elder by Bishop Asbury. He was sent as a missionary to the wilds of Tennessee in 1800, and appointed to Cumberland Circuit, which embraced portions of the States of Tennessee and Virginia. In those early days Indians and outlaws were about the only inhabitants of the primeval forests, which stretched for hundreds of miles between the settlements of the hardy pioneers. It was a plunge into an unexplored and trackless wilderness; but with a courage born of invincible faith he began traveling his new circuit, and toiled on, enduring many hardships, until he rested from his labors in 1837, leaving behind him a good name and a spotless record.

John Russell, son of William Lambuth, was born in 1801. Converted at the age of fourteen, he immediately set about his life work as a soul winner. Taking his young companions aside into a grove near the camp ground (where he had just been converted), he poured forth his soul in their behalf, and was instrumental in leading a number of them to Christ.

He was licensed to preach at sixteen, and in 1821 joined the Kentucky Conference. Volunteering for missionary work among the Creoles and Indians of Louisiana, he immediately started south in company with Benjamin Drake, who also had been transferred to the Mississippi Conference.

Provided with a Methodist preacher's outfit—horse, saddlebags, pocket Bible, hymn book, and Discipline—and fired with holy zeal, the hearts of the young preachers beat high with hope as they turned their faces toward the Sunny South. On their way through Nashville, Tenn., they were joined by Bishop George. The three pushed on day after day, following the pioneer's trail under arching pines, through bogs and swamps and turbid streams.

## A TRAVELING THEOLOGICAL CLASS.

The good Bishop expounded the Scriptures as they rode along, outlined the doctrines of the Church, put and answered questions, and gave out texts from which they preached at noon while they rested on the roadside. Little did the traveling theological class dream how in after years this method of way-side instruction would be reproduced in a distant land. Often in the life of James William Lambuth did he gather his Chinese helpers about him in the shade of some bamboo grove or on the grassy bank of a canal and teach them the deep things of God.

Young Lambuth served circuits in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and, acquiring both the French and Indian languages, preached in them with considerable fluency. While laboring in Louisiana the conversion of a young Indian made a deep impression upon him. The Indian was convicted of sin under his sermon, and came asking what he must do to obtain peace. He was told to go to the grove, pray, and give his whole heart to God. The following morning he returned in great distress, and said: "Me give dog, me give blanket, me give gun; but me get no

peace. What shall Indian do?" The preacher replied: "Go back, give all these to God, and then give him yourself." He went to the grove at once to pray, and in a short time returned with a beaming face, exclaiming: "Me so happy! Great Spirit bless me! Me happy, so happy!" The young missionary rejoiced with him, and thanked God for the opportunity of pointing a child of the forest to Christ.

#### METHODISM IN MOBILE.

While John R. Lambuth did valuable work in other portions of the Mississippi Conference, it was with the city of Mobile, Ala., that his life and labors were most closely identified. In 1826-27 he was appointed to the Mobile Mission, where he organized and built the first Methodist Church in that city. Beginning without a member, after two years of faithful effort a commodious church had been built, and that without the burden of a debt, and one hundred and thirty persons received into membership. Bishop Soule wrote of him: "The prudence, perseverance, and zeal of the missionary on this station are worthy of imitation and praise."

## DEDICATED AT BIRTH.

At the close of his pastorate in Mobile John R. Lambuth was married to Miss Nancy Kirkpatrick, and, locating, moved to Green County, Ala., where on March 2, 1830, the subject of this sketch, James William Lambuth, was born. His father was called home from a protracted meeting in which he was assisting, and, returning to attend a missionary service, he made the following statement to the congregation: "I was called home yesterday to the birth of a baby boy. In heartfelt gratitude to God, I dedicate the child to the Lord for a foreign missionary, and add a bale of cotton to send him with."

With such a dedication, it is not surprising that he dates his religious experience almost from infancy. Writing in his journal in later life: "My own dear father and mother taught me to lift my heart to God in prayer, and when five years of age I felt the blessed influences of God's Holy Spirit."

Sometimes there was an air of seriousness beyond his years about this blue-eyed boy; but his life was a natural one for all that, and had its alternations of light and shadow. With a body as lithe as a cat, and endowed

with the clear eye of a huntsman, walking or riding, fishing or hunting were equally attractive to him. In boyhood the stick and the sling were weapons offensive and defensive, but were succeeded in young manhood by the shotgun and rifle, which were unerring in his hands. The young hunter scorned to shoot a squirrel save through the eye, and many a buck and wild turkey were brought down with his trusty rifle.

### CONVERSION.

At eight years of age he was brought under profound conviction, and united with the Church, but did not experience regeneration. His membership was an outward help, but we find him constantly yearning for a deeper work of grace. In 1848 he entered the University of Mississippi, at Oxford, and during his third year at the university he was happily converted after twelve days and nights of deep conviction and distress of mind. From that hour he determined to do what he could to bring others to Christ. How faithfully he adhered to this determination is evidenced by his lifelong devotion to soul-saving, but noth-

ing short of eternity will reveal the full results of his service.

Graduating in 1852, he returned home and began first the study of medicine and then that of law, but was soon convinced that there was other work for him to do. He prayed earnestly for direction, while his friends urged him to preach the gospel; but he felt unworthy to enter upon such a holy calling. However, after assisting in many religious meetings and being greatly blessed, he was in 1853 given an exhorter's license, and a few months later license to preach. His first work was among the negroes on his father's farm, and while so engaged he heard and responded to the call made by Bishop Andrew for young men for China.

#### ANSWERING THE CALL.

Concerning this important step, William Lambuth writes: "The appeal fired my heart with holy zeal, and the blessed Spirit of God stirred my soul within; and I said, 'I will go even to China to preach the gospel.' The missionary hymn had often inspired me with an earnest desire to carry the blessed gospel of Christ to the regions beyond, and it seemed

in the providence of God that the time had come. I talked with my father about it, and his answer was: ‘My son, you could have no greater field in which to glorify God and to do good to men than in the preaching of the gospel, and I freely give my consent for you to go to China.’” After making it a subject of prayer, he wrote Bishop Andrew, volunteering for service abroad, and was accepted. In the fall of 1853 the Mississippi Conference met at Canton. He was received into the Conference on trial, and appointed missionary to China by Bishop Capers, who presided.

On October 20, 1853, J. W. Lambuth was married to Miss M. I. McClellan, of Cambridge, N. Y., and they, in company with three other missionary couples, after a farewell missionary meeting at Richmond, Va., repaired to New York, whence they were to take passage. The ship *Ariel*, a small sailing vessel, was to take the missionaries to China. There were no magnificent steamships for such distant seaports in those days. They were to sail and drift sixteen thousand miles down the Atlantic, across the equator, around the Cape of Good Hope, around the continent of Africa, up through the Indian Ocean, across

the equator again, among the islands of Malaysia, out by the Philippines, and up through the China Sea.

What sublime patience these early missionaries had! Four months and a half at sea, amid calm and storm, with bad water, moldy bread, and much of the time spent in a room hardly larger than a piano box. No complaint, however, but rejoicing rather that they, with the great apostle, were worthy "to go far hence unto the Gentiles."

### BEGINNING THE WORK.

It was in harmony with William Lambuth's life that he should begin his missionary work with a severe scrutiny of motive and method. Heathenism massed by the archenemy confronted him. He was about to enter the arena of his life work. Like a true soldier, he must test his armor and gird himself for the battle. A few sentences from his journal give the trend of his thought: "Am I living as a child of God? Is God much in my thoughts, and does the consciousness of his presence enter into my daily life, plans, and purposes? Do I sincerely pray, and is God's holy will as such my law?"

The faith, courage, and patience of the new missionaries were the first qualities to be put to the test. The Taiping Rebellion, which had broken out in 1850 in Kwang-si, one of the southwestern provinces, had swept northward and gathered force as it went, until in 1853 the city of Nanking was carried by storm. This threw Shanghai and the surrounding country into a commotion and gave opportunity for a lawless band of Cantonese, more than a thousand in number, to seize and occupy it. These men, called Hoong-der (red heads) from the color of their turbans, secreted themselves near the city wall, throttled the keepers of the gates at the break of day, and dragged the prefect and the district magistrate from their beds and murdered them. Many of the inhabitants were killed or ejected, and the foreigners and imperial soldiers outside the walls were defied by the desperadoes, who were banded together for robbery and pillage.

#### PERILOUS TIMES.

Our missionary party arrived the year after the seizure of the walled city and before the insurgents had been dislodged. They found

temporary homes with the missionaries, the Lambuths living with Dr. and Mrs. W. G. E. Cunningham, about six hundred yards from the city wall. So near were they to the batteries on either side that a stray cannon ball would not unfrequently pass through the house or fall in the yard. Two months after reaching Shanghai, the Lambuths were obliged to move out of this house, which was burned to the ground shortly afterwards. It was unsafe to be in the streets, and it was impossible to carry on the work in the interior; but the study of the language was vigorously pursued in the mornings, and the afternoons given to visiting the sick and ministering to the wounded and dying.

This was the day of small things. Two native Christians constituted the Church, and one of these was Mr. Lear, their first preacher. A union meeting of native Christians of all denominations showed an attendance of only twenty, and the entire native Christian community was not half a hundred. At the present writing there is no church or hall in Shanghai spacious enough to hold them.

The missionary restlessness of the great apostle to the Gentiles was characteristic of

William Lambuth. Call it what we may—the pioneer spirit, the deepening sense of obligation to serve men, or the divine love impelling to seek and save the lost—it constantly manifested itself and was irresistible. One day a neighboring village would be visited, and the next a half dozen country hamlets, and perhaps the day following some walled city, into every nook and corner of which the missionary and his assistants penetrated with their evangel. They prayed as they went: “Lord, give thy servants an abundant entrance. We believe thou wilt bless thy word.” The very simplicity of the missionary’s faith made it invincible. Open doors were constantly looked for and constantly found. Nor was he surprised when the Lord honored his faith.

#### EMBRACING OPPORTUNITIES.

A Chinese gentleman who lived on the shore of the Great Lake invited him to come and preach in his house. Early the following morning, with the promptness of a Havelock, he was on his way, accompanied by Lear. They had not gone far when they met a monster procession moving along the bank of the

canal. It was the birthday of an idol. Here was an opportunity not to be lost; tracts could be distributed, the Scriptures sold, and the gospel preached. They quietly stepped ashore and began work. Mr. Lambuth was always careful not to obstruct a religious procession, but their very presence in this case seemed to anger the crowd. The two were soon in the midst of a surging mob. For a few minutes they were in fearful peril, but at the critical moment an adherent of the Roman Catholic Church, thinking they were priests, rescued them at the risk of his own life. One would suppose this would have ended the effort for that day. Not so. Nothing daunted, they preached on the outskirts of the crowd, nor beat a retreat until again assaulted, their book sacks torn, and they themselves pelted with bricks and mud. Still the day was not counted lost. The intrepid missionary said: "In going a little way from the place we found our native friend still with us. Glad of the opportunity, we explained to him the difference between the Yasu Kiau (Jesus doctrine) and that of the Roman Catholic Church. He went on with us some two miles and heard us preach again. We left him rejoicing and with

the promise that he would come to Shanghai to see us immediately."

Pushing on to the Great Lake, where Mr. Sung lived, the gentleman who had invited them, they were met by their host and conducted to his house. Refreshed with a cup of tea, they preached without loss of time to a great multitude of people on the shore of the lake gathered from the adjacent tea and silk farms. The effort was followed up by the distribution of tracts to those who could read. On their way home Lear had an adventure with a drunken man, who struck him in the eye, breaking his spectacles, and threatened to throw him into a pond. Shaking him off, they reached a Buddhist temple served by a lone priest. "He went in," writes Mr. Lambuth, "lit his candle for us, and we sat with him about two hours telling him of Jesus and the true God." A picture for a Rembrandt: the candle-lit shadows of Buddhism, the sunshine of a glorified Christianity.

#### INCESSANT EFFORT.

It was constantly busy with such work as this that Dr. Lambuth spent thirty-two years in active service in China. While he consid-

ered the occupation of the cities of great importance, and from the first endeavored to intrench the forces of the mission in the various walled towns of the Kiang-su Province, he did not overlook the fact that the cities are fed by the more vigorous life of the rural districts. Itinerating tours alternated monthly with work in Shanghai, where in those early days we can trace his footsteps as he goes about doing good. He seems to preach all the time, pray all the time, and visit all the time. And yet a heavy correspondence and the study of the language claimed many of the early and late hours of the day. He had much of the system of Wesley and the devotional habits of Fletcher. While difficulties multiplied on every hand, and seeming discouragements were enough to dismay the stoutest heart, he quietly pressed on with faith in God and in the ultimate success of the gospel.

It hardly seems credible that one so busily employed in travel, preaching, and personal work should have had time to devote to the preparation of a Christian literature. Yet we find him on a committee of translation of the Scriptures into the Shanghai dialect, and en-

gaged in the translation and publication of a large number of hymns, Wesley's "Sermons," the Discipline, Binney's "Theological Compend," Ryle's "Notes on the Gospels," Ralston's "Elements of Divinity," and a number of schoolbooks, including a geography and an astronomy, besides catechisms and manuals of various kinds.

He opened a boarding school for boys in Shanghai and a number of day schools at different points in the interior. He trained a number of native preachers and assistants, giving them systematic instruction in the Bible and in the evidences of Christianity. Some of these men have passed to their reward after years of faithful and devoted effort, while others still cherishing his spirit are doing their best to be true to their trust which came to them in the gospel through his hands. It is not too much to say that the foundations of our itinerant work and the development of a native agency in the China Mission were mostly due to his patient, loving efforts during the more than three decades of laborious service in which he was always ably seconded by his gifted wife.

## OPENING THE JAPAN MISSION.

The following words are found in a letter written in 1885 by Dr. J. W. Lambuth to Dr. D. C. Kelley, who was Assistant Secretary and Treasurer of the Board of Missions: "If our Board opens a mission in Japan, I am ready to go there and help in that work." This sentiment did not express dissatisfaction with the results of the work done in China. It was rather the expansion of the missionary idea which had grown out of a life-long study of the purpose of God in the redemption of every nation. A study of the field in Japan, with almost daily contact with either missionaries or natives from the Island Empire, had deepened the conviction that the hour had come for our Church to enter.

Bishop H. N. McTyeire, then in charge of the China Mission, in writing to Dr. Lambuth at this time expressed himself as follows: "I trust the Lord's providence directs in this matter, and that he is leading to good and even great results. May your valuable life long be preserved and your strength be renewed, and may its labors be conserved in this Japan field with the best and largest results!" The reply of the simple-hearted missionary

was characteristic: "We thank you and the friends for this determination to open a mission in Japan. We shall go leaning on the omnipotent arm of God and seeking in our work the guidance of the Holy Spirit and his blessing." In pursuance of the instructions of the Bishop, Dr. J. W. Lambuth and Dr. O. A. Dukes landed in Kobe in July, 1886, followed in November by Dr. W. R. Lambuth.

#### ESTABLISHING HEADQUARTERS.

Japan was a new and untried field, but, relying upon the guidance of the Divine Spirit, whose presence he had invoked, the founder of the mission wisely settled upon Kobe as his headquarters. This growing city of over 100,000, upon a magnificent bay at the eastern entrance of the Inland Sea, is the hinge upon which both land and sea travel turns in all that section. No better base could have been selected for evangelistic effort. At a distance of only twenty miles the city of Osaka can be seen with more than half a million people, its public buildings and its factory chimneys gleaming in the evening sun until it seems like Venice to float on the water. Beyond Osaka, some fifty miles by rail, is

Kioto, the western capital of Japan, with its three hundred thousand inhabitants, its numerous temples, its potteries, and especially its schools. Thus within seventy-five miles we have the principal commercial, manufacturing, and educational centers of Japan, while along the Inland Sea and in the interior is a population of 15,000,000 souls within almost twenty-four hours' reach by boat or rail.

#### FOUNDER AND FATHER OF THE MISSION.

Dr. J. C. C. Newton, in writing about the early days of the mission, speaks in the following terms of J. W. Lambuth and the first missionaries: "We know how their hearts burned with the fires of Christ's love as they quickly saw stretching out far and wide the fields white for the harvest; and we know, too, how the heart of the old warrior was stirred with an ardor equal to that of the two younger men. With a rapidity that astonished other missionaries in Japan he went through all the coasts of the Inland Sea, preaching and talking to the people. In fact, there is scarcely a point in our whole field, from Kobe to Oita, that was not either opened by him or with which his labors are not connected. Of the

Kobe Church, which for so long a time worshiped in his house, he is especially to be named as the founder and father.

“His last trip into the interior was to Tadotsu. By invitation of Rev. C. B. Moseley, presiding elder of that district, he preached and dedicated the new house of worship. It was fitting that he should dedicate the house, for he opened the work there and ever watched the tender vine planted in that seat of idolatry. His constant interest in the welfare of the Japanese people and his untiring labor for their salvation are known and read of all. There is no desire to forget the splendid work of others, but this now sainted man of God is the father of our work, and alike by our Japanese Christians and by the missionaries he will ever be named our father.”

#### **UNRESERVED CONSECRATION.**

In a memorial service held immediately after his death, Dr. Newton brought out several characteristics which are true of his life and ministry:

“First, one of the strong characteristics of his whole career, and also the secret of his usefulness, was his unreserved conse-

cration to the one thing. When as a young man just from college he heard the call of God to go preach the gospel in the far-off lands, he said: ‘Here am I; send me.’ There was then and there a complete giving up of everything to that one thing. Kindred, parents, the prospect of a successful career in his native State—all were laid forever on the altar. Henceforth he cared for nothing, sought for nothing, except as it stood related to the preaching of the gospel to the heathen. Social amenities, hospitality (this abounded always), were all consecrated to the one great end in the name of Christ. Nor was he to be a missionary for a limited time—five or six years—and then to return. Nay, he was a missionary for life. Some of us had been thinking he ought to go to America, but he has fallen at his post, just where he wanted to finish his course; and with joy, too. He has given us an example of lifelong, entire consecration to the one thing to which God had called him.

#### DECISION OF CHARACTER.

“Secondly, there was a quiet, gentlemanly decision of character which it is well for us to

ponder. His indomitable will stands out as an example worthy of all imitation as it was illustrated during the late dreadful Civil War. During those long years of fratricidal conflict, cut off from the support and almost from all communication from the home Church, he remained at his post through it all and carried on his missionary work. I trust that I may be pardoned for saying in the presence of the living this: When all the annals of missionary labor shall have been written up, no page of those annals will shine brighter than the one that records the unquenchable devotion and heroic self-sacrifice of Dr. Lambuth and of his equally heroic wife. In the presence of difficulties that made other stout hearts fail, his never did.

#### EXALTED STANDARD OF LIFE.

"Thirdly, he maintained an exalted standard of Christian life, illustrating in his own personal life the principles of the gospel which he preached to others. Did he preach repentance? He himself had repented and renounced every form of sin and needless fleshly indulgence. Faith in Christ as the Lamb of God, the precious Blood that

cleanseth from all sin—this he constantly preached; and his own faith was a living everyday reality. Did he preach the office and work of the Holy Ghost? With him it was not a mere theory. He had the witness of the Spirit. Did he exhort the native Christians unto love supreme toward God, and toward each other brotherly love? He himself was an example of consecrated and unselfish love.

“And here is the secret of that profound respect which the people of China and Japan have for him. People can read the inner heart of their spiritual teachers. This is true everywhere, and especially so in the East. They saw in him the actual experience and power of a redeemed man. The deep love of Christ for their souls—the Christ they had not seen—they saw illustrated, demonstrated in Christ’s messenger whom they had seen. The purity of his thoughts, the singleness of his aim, took hold upon their respect and confidence. This is a matter most important to us. The power and holiness of the heart sanctified by the Holy Ghost, the exalted standard of his life, the absolute certainty and boldness with which he preached a present and

full salvation from all the sin of the spirit and filthiness of the flesh—this is the model for us."

It was in the month of April, when the beautiful Japanese maples begin to leaf, that Dr. Lambuth made his last trip into the interior. A little group of Japanese Christians in the city of Tadotsu, on the southern shore of the Inland Sea, had been for months earnestly studying the Word of God, and had resolved to build a church in which they might worship and the gospel be preached. They were within a short distance of the greatest heathen shrine in all Japan, for do not thousands of pilgrims come annually by sea and land to bow down before Kompira, whose fame is known to every sailor and whose virtues have penetrated every home? Despite all this, the little band had never lost heart. The men had given their ancient armor and the women their silken robes that the proceeds of sale might be devoted to the erection of a Christian temple, and the oldest member of the mission—their spiritual father—was invited to dedicate it to the Lord.

It was his last work. He caught a severe cold from sleeping on the floor, and returned

to Kobe with it rapidly deepening into pneumonia. There was much pain, but no complaint. After a very trying night, he greeted Rev. W. E. Towson with the words: "God has been so good to me." Later on through the same brother missionary he transmitted these words to the native Church: "Tell them to be faithful—faithful to the end." To the Church at home he sent the message: "Tell them I died at my post. We have a great work to do; tell them to send more men."

In the light of a life wholly devoted to the service of his Master, with what can we close this sketch more appropriately than the words of Dr. S. H. Wainright, who, in summing up the characteristics of this truly apostolic missionary, said: "He was persistent in work, unceasing in prayer; always busy, always praying, always talking to men of God, always talking of God to men?"









